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SUBJECT: SYG BAN CONVENES SECOND GROUP OF FRIENDS MEETING  
ON BURMA

REF: USUN NY 1203

**¶1.** (SBU) UN Secretary-General Ban convened a second meeting of the Group of Friends on Burma February 13 attended by Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe, UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari, and all 14 members of the Group of Friends. Ban said that he had received "positive signals" from the regime that Gambari would be able to return to Burma within the next several weeks. Gambari announced he would meet Burmese officials in a third country, but that such an encounter would not replace a trip to Burma.

(Gambari departs February 15 for China, Indonesia, Singapore, and Japan.) Both Ban and Gambari shared the view that the timeline and referendum announced by the regime could be a positive step. Regarding his prospective next visit, Gambari pledged to work with the regime to enhance the credibility of the roadmap process and press the regime to create the necessary conditions for inclusive dialogue between Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK) and the Burmese government. He also reminded the group of the importance of addressing the socioeconomic issues ("root causes") in Burma.

**¶2.** (SBU) The majority of the group, which includes Council members, regional states, and donor states, viewed the regime's roadmap as an opportunity to engage the government of Burma. Even the UK and France identified the recent Burmese announcement as presenting a possible opportunity. China characterized the recently announced referendum and timeline as the only practical means for moving forward. Many members expressed concern about the lack of transparency in the process and the need for a more clarity, agreeing that Gambari should return as soon as possible to assess the situation. The P-3 reminded the group that the regime had not responded to the requirements outlined in the October 11 Security Council Presidential Statement. They also cautioned that the regime needed to show substantive progress or further measures would be considered. Ambassador Wolff advised the group against legitimizing the roadmap process and described recent Burmese actions as likely window dressing designed to legitimize an undemocratic constitution and perpetuate regime rule. End Summary.

UN Lead

**¶3.** (SBU) During the Group of Friends Meeting on February 13, Ban stated that the Burmese announcement of the timeline for the roadmap, including a referendum and elections in 2010, could be a positive step forward. He said that Gambari must return to Burma as soon as possible to assess the situation and added that he had received "positive signals" from the regime that Gambari would be able to return within the next

few weeks. Ban reiterated his call to the Burmese government to respond to outstanding requests by the international community. (Note: The Group does not include Burma.) He commented that in order for the dialogue between ASSK and the government to be meaningful, ASSK's liaison should be the Prime Minister if not Senior General Than Shwe. He requested that the Group of Friends have patience and make a concerted effort to focus on the way forward. In response to a question whether he was prepared to visit Burma, Ban said that he was considering a trip but needed an "appropriate atmosphere" and that timing was an important consideration. Ban also agreed that more frequent meetings of the Group of Friends would be helpful.

¶4. (SBU) Special Advisor Gambari remarked that he would meet Burmese officials outside of Burma. The meeting would not replace his trip to the country, but would give him the opportunity to engage with the regime. (Note: Gambari did not provide any additional details on such a meeting.) During his next visit, Gambari said he intends to focus on ways to improve the credibility of the roadmap process by pushing the regime to open the draft constitution for discussion by Burmese political and ethnic groups and include a clause permitting amendments. He said he would encourage the regime to hold public hearings and publicize the efforts of the Constitutional Drafting Committee. He also said that he would press the regime to create the necessary conditions for a genuine dialogue between the government and Aung Sun Suu Kyi by relaxing the conditions of her arrest, urging the regime to allow NLD offices to open all over the country, and raising the level of ASSK's liaison. Gambari cautioned that even if the dialogue were successful, socioeconomic and humanitarian factors needed to be addressed.

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¶5. (SBU) Ambassador Wolff said that the referendum currently represented an undemocratic constitution with a strictly controlled election. He cautioned that the UN and the Security Council should not legitimize the roadmap process. Wolff emphasized the pressing need for Gambari to return to Burma as soon as possible to assess the situation. UK PR Sawers and French DPR LaCroix agreed that moving forward with a flawed constitution would further destabilize Burma. They also stressed the need for transparency and broad participation of all parties in the roadmap process. Both also remarked that the roadmap represented a possible way forward and commented that with UN and Gambari's assistance, "it might work." Each commented on the availability of economic assistance to the country if the regime makes substantive progress on dialogue and national reconciliation. France reminded the group that without progress, it will be necessary to consider further measures in the Security Council.

¶6. (SBU) Chinese Political Coordinator Li Junhua and Russian DPR Dolgov agreed that the roadmap process should be more transparent and inclusive. Both also expressed the need for Gambari to return to Burma as soon as possible (and both commented that their governments had passed the same message to the Burmese bilaterally). Both also viewed the regime's announcement of a referendum and timeline as a positive development. Political coordinator Li Junhua said that the regime's roadmap could serve as a practical means for engagement and added that the Burmese government and its people should have a sense of ownership of the process. DPR Dolgov called on the international community to encourage the roadmap process as a positive step toward a transition to a civilian government.

ASEAN

¶7. (SBU) Singapore DPR Choek emphasized that he was speaking in his national capacity because Burma had made clear at the

November ASEAN summit that it preferred to deal with the UN (and therefore there was no need for ASEAN to take a role.) Choek also emphasized the importance of inclusiveness in the roadmap process. Indonesian PR Natalegawa echoed the importance of inclusiveness and commented that the Burmese announcement of a referendum was a positive development but more clarity is needed and Gambari should return to Burma as soon as possible. He said that Gambari planned to visit Jakarta on February 21 to consult with senior Indonesian officials on the issue. Thai PR Pramudwinai advocated for Gambari's early return in order for Gambari to "figure out whether the timeline and referendum is legitimate." He also proposed pressuring Burmese leaders publicly to respond to questions about Gambari's return to the country. Additionally, he asked SYG Ban to consider a visit during the 2010 elections. Vietnamese PR Minh said that Vietnam wanted stability in Burma and they were not satisfied with the status quo. The issue is complex, however, he said, and the comprehensive approach is the best way forward.

#### Other Members

¶8. (SBU) Indian DPR Malhotra said that during Foreign Secretary Menon's February 8-10 visit to Burma, India

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recounted the importance of the UN role to the Burmese. Malhotra called on the international community to take note of the positive steps the regime is making and to work with Burma to build on every opportunity "no matter how small." Japanese PR Takasu also welcomed the announcement of a referendum as a positive development and noted the importance of Gambari's role in guiding the Burmese and insuring that the process is inclusive.

¶9. (SBU) The Australian PR Hill, Norwegian DPR and Slovenian PR on behalf of the EU voiced skepticism about the regime's plans to move forward with the roadmap. Norway welcomed the Secretary-General's statement on the referendum, however, and

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said Oslo would support the roadmap process as long as the UN was involved. The Slovenian PR agreed that the UN role was central to the process and remarked that EU Envoy to Burma, Fassino, was in constant contact with Gambari and the good offices mission. The representative also remarked that the EU has 18 million euros set aside for humanitarian assistance

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to address basic human needs in Burma.  
WOLFF